

Statement of Admiral Gary Roughead, U.S. Navy (Retired)
before the
House Armed Services Committee
Subcommittee on Seapower and Projection Forces
June 4, 2020

Chairman Courtney and Ranking Member Wittman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you and other members of the Subcommittee to discuss future force structure requirements for the United States Navy.

As this Subcommittee knows so well getting future naval force design right is hard. It is particularly difficult today because of the uncertainties of forecasting rapid technological change, its likely applications, and maturity; accurately predicting geopolitical, geoeconomic, and military intentions of peer competitors especially China; assessing global naval trends and crafting responses to them for credible forward presence and those solely for combat; the absence of informed discussions and acknowledgement of the need to consider combat losses of ships, aircraft and their precious crews; an over-fixation on the total number of ships in a plan as opposed to the nuanced numbers of specific types of ships needed to support viable operational concepts; an under appreciation of how small allied navies are currently; and the overlooked challenge of supplying naval forces at sea and other combat forces ashore in contested environments.

Our current COVID circumstances and aftermath will further complicate seapower considerations. The coming year will understandably include a lively discussion and debate regarding what should be included in our perception and definition of national security with public health understandably weighing more heavily in the equation. There is a military force structure aspect to that, specifically what existing capabilities should be enhanced and what additional requirements should be added. Questions will be raised regarding the vulnerability of ships to infectious diseases which will add another aspect to and intensify the debate of the right mix of manned and unmanned capability. Although not the sole purview of this Subcommittee, or the HASC, will be the status of U.S. flagged sealift ships. This aged and small fleet, key to supporting U.S. global combat operations, is under additional strain because of dramatic decreases in peacetime cargo revenues which enable operators to sustain that fleet.

All naval force structure assessments must begin with assumptions. These are top of my mind for the coming decade:

- The recapitalization of our seabased deterrent is essential and will remain the top shipbuilding priority. (Accordingly, I will not elaborate on that program in this statement).
- The American public will continue to want to disengage militarily from the Middle East yet not wish to see our influence there diminished.
- The stability of the maritime Middle East and especially disruptions in areas around vital choke points will continue to affect the global economy.
- The U.S. will be a reluctant to commit large numbers of ground forces overseas but will retain an expectation of prompt military response.
- Other nations will be less likely to welcome significant American military presence on their sovereign soil.

- China will continue its expansion as a maritime and naval power which will complicate U.S. maritime activity in the Western Pacific and eventually in the Indian Ocean.
- The probability of Taiwan becoming a military flashpoint through misstep or Chinese aggression will increase.
- If commercial shipbuilding orders remain depressed China will not idle its shipbuilders but will apply the workforce to naval/coast guard construction adding to its capacity in the Western Pacific.
- Our submarines are our winning hand.
- China and Russia will emphasize programs and investments to counter our undersea advantage and will become more proficient in anti-submarine warfare.
- There will not be an appreciable increase in allied naval force structure in the near and mid-term nor will allied seabased logistics be enhanced adding to the demand on U.S. logistic forces.
- Seabased logistics will be imperative given the speed and intensity of war at sea against a peer adversary.
- Reliance on U.S. flagged sealift will not diminish.
- The time to maturity and fielding of new technologies such as artificial intelligence, assured autonomy, hypersonic weapons, and defensive systems against similar adversaries' developments will be overly optimistic.
- Gap filling capability and capacity until the aforementioned technologies are operational such as decoys and relatively inexpensive small UUVs and UAVs to confuse and disrupt will be seen, erroneously, as unnecessary because of the perceived proximate fielding of more exquisite solutions.

It follows from the above assumptions that our naval force structure will remain important to real and perceived, predictable, and sustained military presence. Regional demands will be different but naval presence tailored to regional needs and likely threats will remain in high demand.

Accordingly, a high-low mix strategy for surface combatants should be pursued. The need for high-end surface combatants will be greatest in the Western Pacific with a low to high mix appropriate for the Middle East. The Atlantic will require high-end undersea warfare capability and capacity to monitor and, if necessary, counter Russian submarine operations.

Our submarines are extraordinary assets whether used for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, strike missions, special operations support, or sea control against adversary surface ships or submarines. Using a chess analogy, our nuclear submarines are like an invisible queen on a chess board. They enjoy great flexibility, versatility, and endurance yet their location is unknown complicating an adversary's calculus.

Current numbers of surface combatants and submarines are inadequate. Both shortfalls are very concerning however the known dip in the number of submarines in the coming years is of great concern. Submarine requirements in the Pacific and Atlantic will burden the force and it is likely our submarines will be further taxed in the Arctic in the coming years. The guideline of four ships in our inventory to have one deployed in a particular region should not be discounted nor discarded. To do so invites decreased levels of readiness, inadequate maintenance being performed, and loss of operational proficiency and competence.

Logistics matter greatly. In two decades of war in the Middle East, with the exception of the deadly miles of ground transportation, the flow of supplies in the air and on the sea has been uncontested. Ships operating in support of our ground operations there have enjoyed proximity to secure ports. Nor has there been an appreciable use of expendables such as sonobuoys, decoys, or ordnance. That will not be the case in high tempo operations in the Western Pacific or Atlantic. Moreover, the distances in those areas of operation demand greater attention to seabased logistics force structure.

Sealift to transport expendables, weapons and fuel to areas of operations must figure more prominently in force structure decisions. Readiness of the Ready Reserve Force (RRF) is woefully low. Numbers should be increased and the average age of the RRF ships reduced. While building replacements in U.S. shipyards is a reasonable goal, purchasing newer “used” ships, including foreign built ships, can fill this shortfall faster and likely at less cost. COVID effects on the shipping industry have increased the number of available “used” ships and those opportunities should be pursued promptly.

Maritime domain awareness, networks, and command and control systems are important in monitoring, confronting effectively, and defeating a peer adversary at sea. They must also be robust enough to withstand penetration and disruption techniques. Numbers of sensors, nodes, and pathways must be sized and configured for redundancy and loss. Unmanned systems are ideally suited to fulfilling these needs and can be deployed from distant, safe bases. We have been extraordinarily slow in prototyping, experimenting and accelerating unmanned concepts and systems into the Fleet largely for reasons cost, culture, and process. Every effort must be made to increase their numbers and accelerate deployment and I encourage your Subcommittee and the HASC to authorize greater flexibility and more risk tolerance for unmanned programs.

I am sure in the coming months there will be a renewed debate regarding the U.S. Navy aircraft carrier force that will center on vulnerability and cost. Recent events regarding the COVID outbreak in USS THEODORE ROOSEVELT will flavor those discussions. In contested environments with regional airbases within range of adversary missiles no other military service of any nation has the ability to move as much raw military power into and out of areas of conflict as quickly as the U.S. Navy’s aircraft carrier force. The versatility, range and power of these moveable, sovereign U.S. airbases evolve as new aircraft, manned and unmanned, are brought into service. Returning to my earlier assumption regarding intolerance for forces ashore, the aircraft carrier remains a unique instrument of presence, response, and power.

Creating the capability and capacity I’ve addressed requires a vibrant industrial base and a skilled and experienced workforce. That base is inseparable from any discussion of force structure because it is what makes it possible. Our maritime industrial base from craftsman to seafarer is extremely fragile. As a nation we underappreciate the skill, competence, and dedication of those who envision, design, and build the ships and aircraft our sons and daughters take in harm’s way. The maritime industrial base’s fragility will become more acute if predictable funding is not provided and sustained. Enhancing the base, making it more attractive for young people to pursue, and returning manufacturing of key maritime components to the U.S. will only be possible if it is economically worthwhile and if those who chose to support our maritime needs and interests see a predictable and fulfilling future. That future and a vibrant maritime industrial base requires stability that is best led by this Subcommittee with its exemplary record of bipartisanship.

I understand fully the hard choices to be made as you deliberate on a range of national security matters. I am also aware of the intense pressures on defense and non-defense budgets. The impact of our current COVID circumstances exacerbate those pressures to a degree not seen in decades, indeed lifetimes. The hard choices you will make regarding naval force structure have become much harder but our nation's reliance on credible naval power remains.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before your Subcommittee and I look forward to your questions.